Year nine ‘science fiction’ unit

Avatar

**Plot.**

Released in 2009, ‘Avatar’ is an epic science fiction film written and directed by James Cameron. It is set in 2154 when humans have used up all of the Earth’s natural resources and there is a severe energy crisis. The Resources Development Administration, RDA, is mining for a valuable mineral called **unobtanium** on Pandora, a heavily forested moon in the Alpha Centauri star system. The atmosphere here is poisonous to humans but not the Na’vi, ten foot tall, blue skinned humanoids who live in perfect harmony with nature. They believe that all living things are connected and energy is only ‘borrowed’. They worship a mother goddess called ‘Eywa’.

To explore Pandora the scientists use human/Na’vi hybrids called ‘avatars’. They are genetically matched to humans and are operated using special chambers which transforms the humans into their avatars while they sleep. Dr. Grace Augustine and Norm Spellman use their avatars to explore the planet and collect specimens. Jake goes along as their body guard but becomes more closely connected to the indigenous world than anyone. He is attacked by a thanator and is rescued by Neytiri, a young Na’vi woman. She is given a sign that he is special and takes him to her mother, the clan’s spiritual leader, who tells her to teach him their ways.

Colonel Miles Quaritch is the head of the RDA’s private security army and he does not care about the Na’vi at all. All he cares about is destroying their society and ruining Pandora. He promises Jake that he will provide the money for his spinal operation to allow him to walk again if he collects information about the Na’vi and gets them to leave ‘home tree’. Underneath this amazing tree is the largest deposit of unobtanium ever seen and the invaders want it. However, over three months Jake grows to love the Na’vi and Neytiri in particular and he chooses to support them instead. Colonel Quaritch realises this and when Parker Selfridge, the head of the mining company, agrees they decide to destroy Hometree.

Grace argues that if Hometree is destroyed, the biological connections on Pandora will be damaged forever. Parker Selfridge gives Grace and Jake on hour to persuade the Na’vi people to evacuate the area before the attack. Jake has to confess that he is a spy so the Na’vi take both him and Grace captive and tie them up. Quaritch and his soldiers see this and immediately destroy home tree. Neytiri’s father is killed and many others as well. Neytiri’s mother sets them free but Quaritch decides to break the transmission and their avatars are left behind. Pilot Trudy helps them escape and takes them to the outpost, but they are shot at and Grace is seriously wounded.

To get back the trust of the Na’vi, Jake connects to the mind of the mighty dragon Toruk and flies him to the Tree of Souls. He begs for help to save Grace’s life and transfer her into her avatar body, but it’s too late. Sadly, she dies. The new chief, Tsu’tey translates for Jake while he speaks to the native population and begs them to gather up all of the clans for the coming battle. Quaritch sees the Na’vi pouring in to help and decides to strike the Tree of Souls as this will cripple the indigenous population. In the immediate battle, Tsu’tey and Pilot Trudy are killed, however Eywa responds to Jake’s prayer and the wild life on Pandora join forces with the Na’vi to defeat the enemy. Jake attacks Quaritch’s huge fighter jet and he is forced to escape in an AMP suit. He breaks open the avatar link pod so that Jake’s human body will die, but Neytiri kills Quaritch and saves Jakes life.

All of the human invaders, except Jake, Norm and Max are sent back to the dying Earth. With Eywa and The Tree of Soul’s help, Jake is permanently transferred into his Avatar body to live his life on Pandora.

**Characters.**

***Humans.***

Jake Sully: A disabled marine who becomes a part of the ‘Avatar’ programme when his twin brother is robbed and murdered. His military background makes him seem like a warrior to the Na’vi people and he is more or less accepted by them. Jake is seen as unintelligent by Grace and Norm, but is not only smart but really strong. His incredible courage saves the Tree of Souls and he is then looked after by the indigenous people and Eywa, their deity.

Colonel Miles Quaritch: The head of the mining operation’s security force, he is incredibly loyal to his military code but he has no consideration for the local indigenous people and is out to destroy them. He is typical of an invader who thinks that his way of life is the only right one and his views are totally correct. (Remind you of anyone in Australian history?) Quartich is cruel and manipulative, he sets Jake up as a spy and then turns on him when he sees that he cares more for the Na’vi than for the desperate humans.

Dr. Grace Augustine: Grace is an exobiologist and head of the ‘Avatar’ programme. She is Jake’s mentor and comes to accept him, although at the beginning she thinks he is just a dumb marine. Grace is passionate about the Na’vi way of life and studies their connections to their environment and all living things. She wants to protect them but is overrun by the RDA and their weapons. When she passes away, she becomes one with Eywa and is at peace.

Trudy Chacon: A combat pilot who is assigned to support the Avatar programme. She is stuck in the middle as she is part of the army security detail but is also sympathetic to the Na’vi people and helps the scientists. She is disgusted by the army’s violent and uncaring attitude so pulls out of their side in the final battle and helps Jake. She is unfortunately shot down and dies.

Parker Selfridge: A truly arrogant, unlikeable man Parker is the corporate administrator for the RDA mining operation. All he is interested in is mining unobtainium and making money for the company’s shareholders. At first he is willing to destroy the Na’vi civilisation but he becomes reluctant to authorise attacks on the indigenous population and is uncomfortable with the violence. He only authorises the hits in Home Tree and the Tree of Souls because Quaritch persuades him they are necessary.

Norm Spellman: A xenoanthropologist who studies plant and animal life on Pandora as part of the Avatar programme. He arrives at the same time as Jake and also operates an avatar. Norm is supposed to build bridges with the Na’vi and deal with them diplomatically but Jake turns out to be a much better choice for this role. Norm is jealous of Jake at first and thinks he has no understanding of the indigenous culture, but eventually accepts and supports him.

Max Patel: Max is a scientist who works with Grace and Norm in the Avatar programme and becomes a useful link between what the RDA, the army and the scientists are doing. He supports Jakes rebellion against the RDA and keeps the others informed as to what’s going on.

***Na’vi.***

Neytiri: The daughter of the leader of the Omaticaya, the Na’vi clan that is focussed on in the story. She meets Jake in the forest and is attracted to him because of his bravery, she says he has a ‘strong heart’. However, for the first part of the film she thinks he is ignorant and childish. Her mother makes her teach Jake their ways and they fall in love. Neytiri is strong, loyal and brave.

Mo’at: Neytiti’s mother, Mo’at is the spiritual leader of the Omaticaya clan. Her mate is Eytukan. She is responsible for the Na’vi people’s connection to their environment through the Tree of Souls and Eywa. Mo’at tries to save Grace but is unsuccessful. However, she assists in the transference of Jake from human form to Na’vi.

Eytukan: Neytiri’s father and the clan leader. He is Mo’ats mate and is killed when the invaders attack and destroy Home Tree. He is mourned by his daughter who gains strength from him.

Tsu’tey: The finest warrior in the Omaticaya clan, Tsu’tey was engaged to Neytiri. When Jake first arrives in the clan he laughs at him and thinks he is hopeless. When Jake steals Neytiri, he is furious. However, as Jake becomes more accomplished and shows leadership skills they form a bond. Tsu’tey was to become the next clan chief however is killed in the great battle. He is brave *and strong.*

**Themes**.

Adventure: Jake is drawn to the Avatar programme because as an injured ex-marine, he has little to do. The whole idea of living on Pandora is based on adventure as it is an unknown moon in a galaxy far, far away. Space travel is always problematic and not without danger. The Avatar programme contains a lot of adventure as it is unknown and very new.

Imperialism: Assuming that your society is the best and most advanced is the core of imperialism. Forcing your way of life and beliefs on to other cultures is what imperialists believe is acceptable. The more countries/planets/cultures that you can take over is the important thing – conquer others and convert them to your way of thinking.

Self-discovery: The characters in the film Avatar discover a lot about themselves. They realise that their views and opinions can change and they can become more accepting of others. They also realise that they have hidden strengths and can achieve a lot more than they thought.

Treatment of indigenous people by invaders: The treatment of the Na’vi by the humans is appalling. The humans believe that they are just a group of tree-hugging, blue monkeys who are uncultured and no better than animals. This view is common with invading forces who come up against a culture that they don’t understand. It is exactly how the white settlers treated the Australian Aborigines when they landed on our shores.

Love: There is a lot of love in this film. Jake and Neytiri fall in love, she loves her parents, Jake loved his twin brother who died, Grace loves the Na’vi people and her research, Quaritch loves destroying cultures he despises, Selfridge loves mining unobtanium and making money while the indigenous people love Eywa and their environment.

Connections between living things through ‘Mother Earth’: This is a very old concept, many ancient civilisations have believed in ‘Mother Earth’ and goddesses protecting mankind. In many ways this is true, if we don’t look after our ‘mother’ we will not have a planet to live on. In addition, it is a common belief that all living things are important and connected. Most indigenous cultures share this belief, a good example is how connected our indigenous people are to their land.

Greed and financial profit: Many science fiction films share this theme, it seems to be that money drives scientific discovery rather than the other way around. Selfridge is driven by profit, however he does hesitate to destroy Hometree and the Tree of Souls as his sense of decency appears briefly. Money is power and power makes money – sad but true.

Destruction of our Earth: One of the most common themes of sci-fi films, we have wrecked this planet, let’s find another one to live on. Maybe we can destroy that one too? It is a well-known fact that we are on a collision course with destruction, we have global warming and the eventual end of fossil fuels, as well as nuclear weapons and division between religions and cultures.

Ms. Dight. 2015 